

## **MUNOFS IV Research Report**

**Forum:** General Assembly I

**Issue:** The ethnic conflicts in and around Myanmar

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### **Introduction**

Myanmar, also known as Burma and officially known as the Republic Union of Myanmar, is the 2nd largest country in Southeast Asia. Bordered by China, Laos, Thailand, India and Bangladesh. It has a population of over 55,167, 330 as stated by the CIA world factbook (July 2013 est.). Myanmar is the home to over 10 different ethnic groups, one of them being the Rohingya people.

On March the 2nd 1962, Myanmar was taken under control by the military, led by General Ne Win. According to a special report to the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Geneva, 2003, the Myanmar military is “one of the worlds most repressive and abusive regimes” and is ruled with the government implementing superstitious beliefs. Following the Burmese coup d’etat, there were many protests held by students and members of the community that considered the military control to be restrictive and the coup d’etat to be inadequate. These protests were almost always suppressed using violence. The military rule was ruled as a one party, military system and everything in Burma was nationalized or brought under the government and during this time, Myanmar became one of the most poverty stricken countries in the world.

Myanmar is the home to over 10 different ethnic groups and 5 different religions. The buddhist religion makes up 89% of the total population, and the Christian and Muslim residents can sometimes face religious discrimination and oppression and it is nearly impossible for non-buddhists to join any government or military positions. Noted in a paper published by Samuel Ngun Ling in the Payap University, Chang Mai, Thailand, “over 300 villages have been destroyed in eastern burma” due to the discrimination against muslims. The United Nations estimate of 2009 says there are approximately “729,000 people of the Rohingya ethnic group live in Myanmar”. These Rohingya people have been denied citizenship status and have been treated as if they are illegal immigrants, and there have been over 200,000 of these people that have seeked refuge in Bangladesh in the past 20 years (Burmese exiles in desperate conditions - BBC).

### **Key Terms Defined**

**Coup d’etat:** “The sudden deposition of a government, usually by a small group of the existing state establishment—typically the military—to depose the extant government and replace it with another body, civil or military”. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coup\\_d'état](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coup_d'état))

**Ethnic Groups:** “people of the same race or nationality who share a distinctive culture” (<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=ethnic%20group>)

**Implementing:** “put (a decision, plan, agreement, etc.) into effect”

(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/implementing>)

**Junta:** “A group of military officers ruling a country after seizing power.”  
(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/junta>)

**Nationalized:** “To convert from private to governmental ownership and control”  
(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/nationalized>)

**Oppression:** “The act of oppressing; arbitrary and cruel exercise of power”  
(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Oppression>)

**Persecution:** “The act or practice of persecuting on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or beliefs that differ from those of the persecutor” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/persecution>)

**Refuge:** “Protection or shelter, as from danger or hardship” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/refuge>)

**Regimes:** “A form of government, or a government in power; administration”  
(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/regimes>)

**Rohingya:** “The Rohingya is a [Muslim ethnic group](#) of the Northern Arakan State of Western [Burma](#). The Rohingya population is mostly concentrated in two bordering townships of Arakan to Bangladesh, namely Maungdaw and Buthidaung, and is spread in three townships of Akyab, Rathedung and Kyauktaw.” (<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Rohingya>)

## General Overview of the Topic

The Republic Union of Myanmar is home to over 10 different ethnic groups, and over 5 religions. There have been allegations of genocide and horrific crimes against the Rohingya people, who are a muslim ethnic group. The Burmese refuse to accept and view these people as Myanmar citizens and are and have been attempting to remove these people from the country using force, and are, according to the “Diplomat.com” “one of the world's most persecuted minorities”. This group of people have been seriously oppressed, and not only have there been cases of genocide, but the Rohingya people are not allowed to travel without official permission (making it difficult to flee), are completely forbidden to own land, and are not officially allowed to have more than two children in a family.

There are a series of riots and continuing battle among the Rohingya people and the Rakhine in the north of the country. According to the myanmar authorities, the conflict has left 78 people dead, 87 injured, and thousands of homes destroyed. In response to the situation at hand, the Burmese government has deployed numerous troops and soldiers in the regions, and have enforced a curfew. The army has been accused of discriminating against the Rohingya people through random violence and mass arrests. A large amount of Buddhist monks have played an important part in preventing any humanitarian aid to the Rohingya people and community.

The conflict between not only the government and the Rohingya people, but also involving the Rakhine people has destroyed many peoples lives. There are thousands of refugees seeking help in Bangladesh and the bordering countries and nearly all of them have lost their homes, or find it too difficult to live in Myanmar. The majority of the deaths and genocide have been as a result of religious differences, and intolerance of others. The Burmese are discriminatory against the Rohingya people in ways that are unacceptable. On June 29th 2012, the United Nations refugee agency said they had “begun redeploying

staff to the Rakhine state where the violence has displaced thousands of people”.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

The UNHCR has set up resettlement programs to try and find homes for the Rohingya refugees in donor countries. According to the UN news center, “the UNHCR has begun providing shelter, material and basic aid items, such as blankets, mattresses and other essential household items, to all affected communities”, and have also “begun needs assessments in relief camps and has distributed relief items such as blankets, tarpaulins, kitchen sets and mosquito nets to some 5,000 people in 30 locations”.

### **Bangladesh:**

The Bangladeshi border guards have increased border security and still refuse the Burmese refugees entry into the country. According to the article, “Burma's Rohingya refugees find little respite in Bangladesh”, “Already more than 250,00 Rohingya people have been forced out of Burma and into Bangladesh”. In November 2010, the Bangladeshi government suspended the UNHCR’s “resettlement program” where already 900 Rohingya refugees have been resettled into willing host countries.

### **Rakhine Buddhist monks in Burma:**

The monks who are discriminatory against the Rohingya people have done their best to prevent as much humanitarian aid to the Rohingya people and community as possible.

### **UN World Food Programme:**

According to the “UN refugee agency redeploys staff to address humanitarian needs in Myanmar” article found on the UN News Center website, “the WFP has distributed food to approximately 92, 000 people.

## **Timeline of Events**

January 4th 1948 - Shortly after the independence from the British, the civil war in Burma began. It is the longest-running civil war in the world.

2nd March 1962 - Burmese coup d’etat

November 2010 - Bangladesh suspended the UNHCR resettlement program in the country

2012 - Beginning of the Rakhine State riots

10th June 2012 - State of emergency declared in the Rakhine region, allowing military to involve themselves in the running and control of the area.

15-18th June 2012 - Casualty figures updated to 80 deaths and estimated 90,000 people were displaced. Bangladesh rejects the fleeing Rohingya’s and sends them back to Myanmar. The government of Myanmar places 10 arrests against UNHCR workers and charged 3 with “stimulating” the riots. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited and asked for the release of the workers which the President said he would not do unless the UN helped resettle up to 1,000,000 Rohingya Muslims. The UN rejected the President's proposal.

Late October 2012 - More riots break out and, according to the Myanmar government, over 80 people were killed, more than 22,000 displaced, and over 4,600 houses burnt. The outburst of riots brought the total number of displaced to 100,000 since the beginning of the conflict.

### **UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

**UN renews call for dialogue between displaced persons and Myanmar authorities** (13th August 2013) [ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45614&Cr=myanmar&Cr1=#.UgzVbr-9quV> ]

“The United Nations refugee agency today reiterated its call for dialogue between displaced Muslims in Myanmar’s Rakhine state and national authorities after recent violent clashes left one man dead and 10 other people injured.” “UNHCR is reiterating its call for peaceful dialogue and confidence building between the IDPs [internally displaced persons] and Government. We believe this is key to avoiding further violence,” Adrian Edwards, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told a [news conference](#) in Geneva.” “Some 140,000 people remain internally displaced in Rakhine state following last year’s inter-communal violence, according to UN agency figures.”

**UN responds to humanitarian needs in Myanmar following recent violence** (29th June 2012) [ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42271&Cr=myanmar&Cr1=#.UgzVZ7-9quV> ]

“United Nations relief agencies are responding to the humanitarian situation in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine state, in the wake of violence there which has displaced thousands of people.” “The Myanmar Government has requested urgent humanitarian assistance for the affected people in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Sittwe, with food, shelter and medical assistance urgently required. A full UN assessment mission is being organised, and it is expected to provide a clearer picture of the extent of humanitarian needs in the affected area.”

**UN refugee agency redeploys staff to address humanitarian needs in Myanmar** (19th June 2012)[ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42356#.UgzVT7-9quU> ]

“The United Nations refugee agency today said that it had begun redeploying staff members to Myanmar’s northern Rakhine state, where violence has displaced thousands of people.” ““We are also participating in a joint visit by the Government, UN, non-governmental organization, and representatives from donor countries to areas affected by the violence,” Mr. Edwards said during a press briefing in Geneva. “They will spend two or three days in Rakhine state.” “UNHCR has begun needs assessments in relief camps and has distributed relief items such as blankets, tarpaulins, kitchen sets and mosquito nets to some 5,000 people in 30 locations. Further supplies for an additional 35,000 people will reach Sittwe early next week”

## Possible Solutions

1. Increase food, water and medical supplies to the displaced Rohingya people from the UNHCR. This would decrease mortality rates and prevent the spread of disease in unsanitary conditions.
2. To call for the UNHCR to seek out more donor countries willing to accept the displaced Rohingya people, possibly ones with similar Muslim faith. This will mean that not only will the Rohingya people be accepted into a country, but if the country has a large amount of population with a similar faith, there will be more cultural tolerance and understanding.
3. To promote cultural and religious harmony in the country of Myanmar by educating the population of religious tolerance and different beliefs and ideologies. If the students in universities and the non-educated population understand the issue, or the other religions beliefs, it might promote and build more tolerance in the country.
4. Also by raising awareness of the issue of racial and cultural discrimination and intolerance in other and surrounding countries, it would prevent the same situation from repeating itself in another country.

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